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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses a study of self-disclosure patterns of 29 college men and 35 college women. The purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which college students confided in their best male friend, best female friend, mother, and father about attitudes and opinions, tastes and interests, work and studies, money, personality, and body. The hypothesis was that the best cross-sex friend would emerge as the primary confidant for both male and female college students. In previous research the best same-sex friend had been found to be the primary confidant. In this study students were directed to respond to a 58-item self-disclosure questionnaire. Responses were analyzed statistically, specifically by analysis of variance and t-tests. Findings indicated that the hypothesis was not supported. Two of the conclusions were that (1) both males and females used their best male and female friend equally as confidants, and (2) males in a committed relationship and single females directed the most self disclosures to their best female friend. Additional research is suggested to delineate the link between love and self disclosure. (DE)

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SELF-DISCLOSURE PATTERNS OF MALE AND FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS: CHANGE OVER TIME

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RESEARCH PROBLEM

Some would argue (Jourard in Derlega and Chaikin, 1975) that self-disclosure is necessary for developing an intimate relationship such as marriage. Love is impossible without self-disclosure. There is some research to support this claim. Self-disclosure does seem to be positively correlated with deep emotional attachment and marital satisfaction (Rubin, 1973; Levinger and Senn, 1967). Thus, we could conclude that self-disclosure lies at the heart of an intimate relationship.

Problems may arise when people come to intimate relationships with different expectations regarding self-disclosure. This is perhaps not uncommon in the case of cross-sex intimate relationships since men and women, due to socialization experiences, may have different expectations in terms of how much and what should be disclosed to one another. Females may be socialized to disclose a great deal while males learn it is unmanly to do so (Derlega and Chaikin, 1975; Balswick and Peek, 1971). Accordingly, it would be wise to examine the patterns of self-disclosure exhibited by both males and females.

Jourard and his associates (Jourard and Richman, 1963; Jourard and Lasakow, 1958) began this task during the late 1950's and early 1960's with college men and women. His research suggested that both males and females tended to disclose the most to same-sex friends. If cross-sex friendships are considered to be socialization experiences for marriage, these college men and women may not have been engaging in

adequate anticipatory socialization even though they were probably also involved in the courtship system. On the other hand, one could argue that the norms governing cross-sex relationships in the late 1950's did not emphasize self-disclosure. Perhaps, we are judging this data in terms of today's norms. The question then is, can we see any changes over time in the self-disclosure patterns of men and women?

Komarovsky's data (1974) on the self-disclosure patterns of 62 college men suggest that there have been changes over time. For these men, the closest female friend emerged as the primary confidant, closest male friend dropped to second place.

To our knowledge, there are no data comparable to Komarovsky's that deal with changes in the self-disclosure patterns of college women. Our research was done in part to fill in this gap.

PREDICTIONS

Based on Komarovsky's research (1974), we predicted that both male and female college students would evidence change from the past in terms of self-disclosure patterns. The best cross-sex friend would emerge as the primary confidant rather than the best same-sex friend which was the pattern in the past.

ADDITIONAL VARIABLES

Although we were primarily interested in examining whether self-disclosure patterns are affected by the sex of discloser and disclosee, we felt that other variables could affect these patterns as well. Specifically, we were interested in looking at the link between love and

self-disclosure. Accordingly, we included the variable marital status in our analysis and looked at it particularly in terms of the cross-sex and same-sex friend as primary confidant. Respondents were classified as committed, if they indicated they were married, engaged or currently co-habitating. Respondents were classified as single, if they indicated they were dating one person steadily, dating often, dating occasionally or not dating.

SAMPLE

The sample was composed of 64 college men (N=29) and women (N=35). All were enrolled in a course on intimate relationships taught by the author in the spring and winter terms of 1976 or 1977, respectively. The average age of the sample was 21.55 years.

METHOD

Each subject was asked to complete a self-disclosure questionnaire (adapted from Jourard and Lasakow, 1958) which contained 58 items grouped under six topic areas: Attitudes and Opinions, Tastes and Interests, Work or Studies, Money, Personality, and Body. The respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they had been open to their Best Male Friend, Best Female Friend, Mother and Father, for each of the 58 items. A scale ranging from 0-2 was used. An X was to be placed next to an item if they had misrepresented themselves to another regarding the item.

RESULTS

We utilized analysis of variance and t-tests as our main statistical tools. A weighted means analysis was used since we had unequal cell frequencies.

A two-way analysis of variance was computed for each potential confidant, mother, father, best male friend, best female friend. We had a 2X2 factorial design with sex of respondent and marital status as the two factors.

Results for Predictions

Looking at the rank order of the marginal means for sex of respondent, it appears that there is partial support for our predictions concerning the use of the best cross-sex friend as the primary confidant.

/Table I about here/

For the male respondents, the best female friend did receive the most self-disclosures ($\bar{X}$=70.90) followed by the best male friend ($\bar{X}$=65.55), mother ($\bar{X}$=58.66) and finally father ($\bar{X}$=53.34). On the other hand, the differences between the means for best female friend and best male friend was not significant (t=-.84,df=56) suggesting our predictions did not hold for the male subjects. Likewise, the data from the female subjects failed to support our predictions regarding the use of the cross-sex friend as the primary confidant.

At first glance, it seems that the female respondents are still using their best same-sex friend as their primary confidant ($\bar{X}$=84.57) followed by their best male friend ($\bar{X}$=80.83), mother ($\bar{X}$=70.00) and finally, father ($\bar{X}$=57.71); (Table 1). As in the case of male respondents, however, the difference between the means for best female friend and best male friend was not significant (t=-.71, df=68). Again, our predictions were not supported.

Although our predictions were not supported some significant results were obtained from the data. Sex of respondent did seem to be related to the amount of self-disclosure. Females tended to disclose more to each of the four confidants in comparison to males (Table 1). Furthermore, the analysis of variance suggest that the differences between the means for best male friend by sex of respondent and best female friend by sex of respondent were significant ($F=6.77$, $df=1,60$, $p \leq .01$ for male friend, (Table 2) ; $F=5.24$, $df=1,60$, $p \leq .05$ for female friend, (Table 3)).

/Table 2 about here/

/Table 3 about here/

Results for Additional Variables

Our data did produce evidence for the link between love (as measured by marital status) and self-disclosure. The patterns of self-disclosure in terms of best male and best female friend for both sexes did differ according to the marital status of the respondent.

Looking at the data for the male respondents, committed males' best female friends received significantly more self-disclosures ($\bar{X}=84.67$) than their best male friend ($\bar{X}=56.78$; $t=2.49$, $df=16$, $p \leq .05$). In comparison, single males did not significantly vary the amount of self-disclosure according to sex of friend ($\bar{X}=69.50$ for male friend; $\bar{X}=64.70$ for female friend; $t=.66$, $df=38$; (Table 4)).

/Table 4 about here/

Although marital status also affected the self-disclosure patterns of the female respondents in regard to male best friend and best female friend, the patterns were different from those of the male respondents. Committed female students, like single male students, did not significantly vary the extent to which they revealed themselves according to the sex of the best friend ($\bar{X}$=94.38 for best male friend; $\bar{X}$=83.85 for female friend; t=1.13, df=24). On the other hand, single females directed significantly more self-disclosures to their female friends (X=85.00) in comparison to their male friends ($\bar{X}$=72.82; t=-1.69, df=42, $p \leq .05$; (Table 4)).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our data did not support our predictions regarding the use of the cross-sex friend as the primary confidant. Rather both male and female college students use their best male and best female friend equally as confidants. These data may indicate a change from the past, in the sense, that students are no longer differentiating according to sex of their friends for self-disclosure purposes.

What has not changed over the years, is the sex difference in terms of amount of self-disclosure. The female students in our sample tended to disclose more to all four confidants in comparison to male students. In the past (Derlega and Chaikin, 1975), when a sex difference has emerged, it has been females who have disclosed the most. This could be due to a difference in socialization in that females learn to disclose a great deal while males learn to be more reticent about disclosing.

Love, as measured by marital status, did affect our basic findings. Although single males used their male and female friend equally as

confidants, committed males directed the most self-disclosures to their best female friend. If we assume the best female friend for the committed male was his partner in his marriage, engagement or cohabitating relationship, then we can conclude that the committed male was acting in accordance with norms which specify that one should use one's partner in a love relationship as one's primary confidant. These findings also provide some evidence for the theoretical and empirical connection between love and self-disclosure.

In summarizing the data from the female respondents, the single females evidenced no change from the past in that the best same-sex friend emerged as the primary confidant. The committed females did not differentiate according to the sex of their best friends when using them as confidants. Could it be that the committed females are not acting in accordance with the expectations regarding the appropriate confidant in a love relationship? An examination of the analysis of variance and subsequent post-hoc tests for best male friend by sex of respondent and marital status can shed some light on this question.

When a two-way analysis of variance was calculated with self-disclosure directed at best male friend serving as dependent variable and sex of respondent and marital status serving as independent variables, a significant interaction effect resulted (Table 2). A Scheffe' post-hoc test indicated that the difference between the means for committed females ($\bar{X}$=94.38) and single females (X=72.82) was significant ($p \leq .05$); (Table 5).

/Table 5 about here/

These findings suggest that even though females when they are in a love relationship continue to disclose a great deal to their female friends, they increase, significantly, the amount which they reveal to their best male friend (or partner in the love relationship). In other words, committed females do act in accordance with the norms which specify the appropriate confidant for love relationships.

On the other hand, why do committed females continue to use their best female friend as an important confidant? This question may be answered by going back to the finding indicating that females tend to disclose more than males. Since females may be socialized to disclose more than males and self-disclosure is a reciprocal process (Derlega and Chaiken, 1975), committed females may find it necessary to go to someone in addition to their male partner. The female may perceive the male as simply unwilling to accept the "excess" self-disclosures. These interpretations and conclusions are tentative, but, could form the basis for future research into the area of self-disclosure. In any event, the data from both the male and female respondents suggest that there is a link between love and self-disclosure and that future research should be aimed at delineating this link more clearly.

Table 1

Rank Order

of

Marginal Means

For

Sex of Respondent

	Sex of Respondent	
	Male (N=29)	Female (N=35)
Best Female Friend	70.90	84.57
Best Male Friend	65.55	80.83
Mother	58.66	70.00
Father	53.34	57.71

Table 2

Analysis of Variance

for Effects of

Sex of Respondent and Marital Status

on

Best Male Friend

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F. Ratio
Sex	1	3489.42	6.77**
Marital Status	1	869.82	1.69
Sex X Marital Status	1	4147.30	8.05**
Experimental Error	60	515.05	

**$p \leq .01$

Table 3

Analysis of Variance

For Effects of

Sex of Respondent and Marital Status

on

Best Female Friend

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F-ratio
Sex	1	2747.19	5.24*
Marital Status	1	1130.40	2.16
Sex X Marital Status	1	1573.52	3.00
Experimental Error	60	524.20	

*$p < .05$

Table 4

Cell Means

For

Sex of Respondent

and

Marital Status

	Committed Males (N=9)	Single Males (N=20)
Best Female Friend	84.67	64.70
Best Male Friend	56.78	69.50
Mother	43.67	65.40
Father	37.11	60.65

	Committed Females (N=13)	Single Females (N=22)
Best Female Friend	83.85	85.00
Best Male Friend	94.38	72.82
Mother	75.70	66.64
Father	64.15	53.91

Table 5

Differences Between Means

For

Sex of Respondent X Marital Status

For

Best Male Friend

	CM	SM	CF	SF
Committed Male		-12.72	-37.61**	-16.04
Single Male			-24.88**	- 3.32
Committed Female				-21.57*
Single Female				

**$p \leq .01$ For Scheffe' Tests

**$p \leq .05$ For Scheffe' Tests

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